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THE WOMEN OF MIDDLETON AND WEBSTER

Middleton is a dramatist about whom it is difficult to make up one's mind. He seems not to have had quite the gift of clear imaginative beauty that belongs to Dekker; yet his plays—even the weakest—glitter frequently with jewels of poetry like the following in *A Game at Chess*:—

“Upon those lips, the sweet fresh buds of youth,
The holy dew of prayer lies like pearl
Dropt from the opening eyelids of the morn
Upon the bashful rose.”¹

He has nowhere the tenderness and pathos of *The English Traveller* or *A Woman Killed with Kindness*; yet for pure tragic power *The Changeling* has certainly not been surpassed by many succeeding plays. At times he seems almost like a hack-writer, furnishing tragedy or comedy, melodrama or romance, at the manager's order; yet everything he does in any line has a freshness, an ease, a vivacity which the ordinary hack-writer may envy but cannot attain.

So with what concerns women. Middleton has hardly a heroine of importance who wins our affection or sympathy. We shall look in vain in his pages for a Mistress Frankford or even a Bellafront. Yet he is far from avoiding women or slighting them, as do Jonson and Chapman. His plays are full of them. They even creep into the very titles of three: *Women Beware Women*; *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*; *More Dissemblers Besides Women*. Middleton was a keen, occasionally a profound, observer, and his scenes are full of comments on feminine life which are highly illustrative of the manners of the age, such, for instance, as the wild overflow of Lazarillo's talk in the third act of that curious medley, *Blurt, Master Constable*; but, though less caustic and cynical than Marston, Middleton is almost always a satirist and has none of Heywood's sympathy.

The greater number of Middleton's plays are lively comedies of social life and manners. On the whole, one associates his

¹ *A Game at Chess*, I, 1.

name with that sort of work more than with anything else. His best plays in this kind are *A Trick to Catch the Old One*; *A Mad World, My Masters*; and *Michaelmas Term*; and very gay and laughter-breeding matters they are, free from the harsher and heavier satire of Jonson, but by no means very pure or very delicate. The rôle of women in them is sometimes considerable but not generally very attractive, although here and there we catch a glimpse of a sweet, graceful figure. Lady Cressingham in *Anything for a Quiet Life* is worthy of notice from her prominent position in the play. In *Blurt, Master Constable*, the study of the courtesan Imperia is admirable and well worth comparing with Dekker's *Bellafront*. Here is no repentance, no reformation, no possibility even of such a thing: Imperia is a mere wanton, idle featherpate, subject forever to flattery and vanity, incapable alike of evil and of good. From the first scene in which she is introduced in so masterly a fashion, to the very end of the play she is the same,—a stationary character.

In the romantic drama Middleton is somewhat less successful. Without going into the discussion as to how much *The Witch* owes to Shakespeare, it is enough to say that, in spite of splendid poetry, the play is not attractive, and that the women in it offer nothing to redeem the rest.

A Fair Quarrel contains some noble scenes, but is rather chaotic and extravagant in general treatment. In this play Middleton worked with Rowley, and it is difficult to decide how much of its merit or demerit is owing to our dramatist.

The same is true also of *The Spanish Gypsy*, in which again Rowley collaborated; but, whoever wrote it, the play is one of the sunniest and sweetest of romantic comedies. It contains a considerable number of plots, but they all work out to a pleasant ending. That which gives the title to the play is the story of Alvarez, a Spanish nobleman, who is banished from his country for killing an enemy, but who returns and wanders about with his family, disguised as a gypsy. All this has the same pleasant flavor of Bohemian and nomadic existence that gives charm to *The Beggar's Bush* of Beaumont and Fletcher and *The Jolly Beggars* of Brome. Of course, Alvarez has a pretty niece, Constanza, who, by the way, is one of the very

youngest of Elizabethan heroines (twelve years old).² Of course, she wins the affections of a young gallant who ought to have something better to do than run after pretty gypsies. Of course, Alvarez is recalled from banishment and reconciled to his enemy's son, and Constanza marries her noble lover. Because these things do not happen in real life, there is all the more reason that they should happen in the kingdom of fancy. What is real life, after all, but a poor dull parody on fancy's realm? This we say to ourselves when we see such plays as *The Spanish Gypsy*, and we go away content.

It would be unpardonable to write of Middleton without some reference to that nondescript and Aristophanic comedy, *A Game at Chess*, in which kings and queens and bishops and knights and pawns march about as bravely, and rave as foolishly, and play the fool as wisely, as the real flesh-and-blood men and women of this world. I am the more bound to mention it, as the figure of the White Queen's Pawn is one of the gentlest and sweetest of Middleton's feminine creations. Here is the lovely language in which she answers the Black Bishop's Pawn, who attempts to insinuate himself into her affections under the pretext of inviting her to confession. "Resolve you thus far," he says,—

"The privatest thought that runs to hide itself
In the most secret corner of your heart now
Must be of my acquaintance, so familiarly,
Never she-friend of your night counsels nearer."

and she:—

"I stand not much in fear of any action
Guilty of that black time, most noble holiness.
I must confess, as in a sacred temple,
Thronged with an auditory, some come rather
To feed on human objects than to taste
Of angels' food ;
So in the congregation of quick thoughts,
Which are more infinite than such assemblies,
I cannot with truth's safety speak for all :
Some have been wanderers, some fond, some sinful ;
But those found ever but poor entertainment,
They had small encouragement to come again."³

² *The Spanish Gypsy*, II, 1.

³ *A Game at Chess*, I, 1.

The two plays of *Women Beware Women* and *The Changeling* are usually considered to be Middleton's masterpieces, at least in tragedy. Neither of them is agreeable, yet both are works of tremendous tragic power.

Bianca, the heroine of *Women Beware Women*, is a young, inexperienced girl who has made a runaway match with Leantio, a man much below her in fortune and position. We first find them in love's early days, billing and cooing in all the bliss of amorous content. But the sky soon clouds over. Leantio is called away from love by business and leaves his wife, as much for her good as for his own. She resents it: other young wives have done the same since her time. In her husband's absence, the Duke sees her, falls in love with her, and tempts her. She makes a feeble and quite vain resistance, and her happiness is gone from her. The further treatment of her character is powerful, but unattractive. She is a shallow, witless fool. No remorse stirs her, no pity, no tenderness for the husband whom she has wronged. When she dies, in the midst of the indiscriminate butchery which rather clumsily ends the play, her last words are only of passion for her ducal lover:—

"My soul stands ready at my lips,
Even vexed to stay one minute after thee."⁴

The figure of Leantio is far more touching and more truly tragic than that of his wife. All of his scenes with Bianca—their tender love at first, his return and reception with unexplained mockery and coldness, and, finally, his discovery of her guilt and his accusation of her—are magnificently dramatic. And how admirably Elizabethan is his cry when he discovers the true nature of his situation:—

"I'm like a thing that never was yet heard of,
Half merry and half mad."⁵

The Changeling,⁶ like *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, is marred by the introduction of a secondary plot (which, however,

⁴ *Women Beware Women*, V, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 2.

⁶ In this play, as in several others of Middleton's best, Rowley collaborated. Rowley was often a collaborator, but his own unassisted work is hardly equal to what he did with others. His comedies are lively, but his tragedy *All's Lost by Lust* has certainly none of the merit of *The Changeling*.

gives the title to the play) of far inferior importance and interest; but the story of Beatrice and De Flores is one of the most simple and powerful pieces of tragedy in the Elizabethan drama. The heroine, like Bianca in *Women Beware Women*, is thoroughly hateful and continues so to the end; yet the skill, the fineness, the depth, shown in the drawing of her character seize and hold the reader from the outset with an irresistible fascination. Never was there a more compelling study of feminine wilfulness and giddy caprice, ungoverned and unsteadied by moral habit or profound affection.

Beatrice is first presented to us as betrothed to one Alonzo de Piracquo, to whom she is very shortly to be married. Unexpectedly there comes across her path a certain stranger, Alsemero, with whom she at once falls in love, in her own wayward fashion: love at first sight, but rather the careless caprice of a giddy schoolgirl than the mighty tide of passion that overwhelms a Juliet. To Beatrice, however, caprice is law. It would seem natural to go at once to her father, explain everything, and so endeavor to withdraw from a match now become distasteful and almost impossible. This, however, is not her way. She does not wish to encounter such an open shame. There is a fellow named De Flores, a rough, ugly, rascally fellow, yet with a touch of finer stuff about him, too, as he himself says:—

"Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude,
I tumbled into the world a gentleman."¹

This uncouth, beastly creature follows Beatrice, with a curious, dog-like worship for which he at first receives nothing but abuse and spurning. She loathes him with an intensity out of proportion even to his ugliness, yet he haunts her just the same. Then suddenly, when she has conceived her love for Alsemero, there comes an idea into her poor, flighty, unmoral brain. This hideous, fawning follower of hers, born to do ill deeds in dark corners—why not make use of him? Life or death is as nothing compared to her whims. Why not bid De Flores get rid of De Piracquo? That would take off De Flores too, which of itself

¹ *The Changeling*, II, 1.

would be worth while. She changes her manner to him till he cries out in ecstasy:—

“I am up to the chin in heaven.”⁸

She tempts him, sweet, foolish devil that she is: but little need of tempting here. Even she is astonished at his readiness, never for a moment imagining his real motive, but thinking that gold is all that he wants.

De Piracquo is thus eliminated from a world which will not, perhaps, greatly feel the loss of him. His murderer comes to his murderess with the news, and she receives him with a bit of exquisite Shakespearean poetry which at first startles us in such a mouth, until we remember that the woman lacks neither imagination nor intellect, but only heart and conscience:—

“My joys start at mine eyes: our sweet’st delights
Are evermore born weeping.”⁹

De Flores produces as a proof of his deed one of De Piracquo’s fingers, with a ring on it. Beatrice’s nice senses are shocked at this:—

“Bless me, what hast thou done?”⁹

Observe the crushing force of his equally characteristic answer:—

“Why, is that more
Than killing the whole man?”⁹

She gets bravely over this. Still she does not like the fellow’s looks. Pay him, and send him about his business! She has the money with her. No, he does not want it. Then what does he want? More? He shall have double. No, that would only double the insult. Heavens! this killing is costly business. But in any case he must fly at once. Let him write his demand and she will satisfy it. Only let him *fly*! To which De Flores, hoarsely and sullenly:—

“You must fly too then.”⁹

And she in anguish, horror, and bewilderment:—

“I?”⁹

Thereupon the fierce and cold and hideous snake slowly gathers in his coils about her. She struggles, she writhes; her

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 4.

monstrous pride, the only strong thing in her, which she mistakes for maiden modesty, recoils with all its might against the doom she has brought upon herself. She pleads with him passionately to take her wealth, her all, and let her "go poor unto her bed with honor". He neither hears nor heeds, but steadily urges his point and uses every advantage:—

"Nor is it fit we two, engaged so jointly,
Should part and live asunder."⁹

"Pish! you forget yourself;
A woman dipped in blood, and talk of modesty!"⁹

Finally:—

"You are the deed's creature; by that name
You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
As peace and innocence has turned you out,
And made you one with me."⁹

The deed's creature! Has it ever been expressed more succinctly, more tragically, more terribly? *The deed's creature!* No longer a free woman, love and happiness within her grasp, but forced to cringe and cower, to lurk in dark corners, to dread the gleam of the sun, the rustle of the breeze, and the smile of man. *The deed's creature!* She sees it now herself, it has penetrated even her poor, silly, idle brain. She turns faintly, shrinkingly, into the one path offered to her, with a scream of horror and despair:—

"Vengeance begins;
Murder, I see, is followed by more sins:
Was my creation in the womb so curst,
It must engender with a viper first?"⁹

This is, indeed, a *scène à faire*; and Middleton has done it so that it stands not very far behind the second act of *Macbeth*.

Through the two remaining acts the play is powerfully carried on. Doubts have been expressed about the scene in which Beatrice examines the vials. It is certainly very disagreeable, not to say grotesque; but I feel that it is thoroughly in keeping with her character. There is, however, one more scene of superb tragic power. Beatrice has been driven to practise, by means of her maid Diaphanta, an infamous decep-

⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 4.

tion on Alsemero, to whom she is now married. At the dead hour of midnight she and De Flores are waiting together to hear of the girl's success. Minutes pass as slowly as hours and they fear treachery. De Flores blames her for trusting a waiting-woman, and she answers, her old-time petulance blending with her new despair:—

“I must trust somebody.”¹⁰

Still the minutes pass. They confer in anxious whispers. De Flores, in extremity, proposes to burn the house. The old, foolish Beatrice objects to the danger, and is silenced again by the sharp ruffian wit:—

“Yon talk of danger when your fame 's on fire.”¹⁰

He will set the fire and shoot Diaphanta in the confusion. She assents and he is about to leave her, when hush! even De Flores's nerve is shaken for a moment as something steals past him in the cold silence;—

“Ha! What art thou that tak'st away the light
Betwixt that star and me? I dread thee not:
'T was but a mist of conscience, all's clear again.”¹⁰

And the same terror creeps over his partner in guilt, as she is left alone in the chilly night:—

“Who 's that, De Flores? bless me, it slides by!
Some ill thing haunts the house, 't has left behind it
A shivering sweat upon me. I'm afraid now.
This night hath been so tedious!”¹⁰

So Diaphanta goes the same way as De Piracquo, and all to no purpose. It is unnecessary to trace out in detail the exposure of the criminals. In the end they are both brought to confess their crime. Neither of them hints at anything like real penitence. Beatrice makes a sort of stage-show of it, but we know perfectly well that the mark of the beast is upon her and that she would be only too ready to begin again, if opportunity offered. As for De Flores, he dies exactly as he had lived. Indeed, he considers himself rather fortunate, for he got what he wanted, so far as this life was concerned, and he does not indicate the slightest fear of another.

¹⁰ *The Changeling*, V, 1.

Such is this remarkable play: not one of the most moving, certainly not one of the most beautiful, of its time, but one of the most intensely human, and full of both truth and power from beginning to end.

It sometimes seems as if that sum of supreme qualities which we find so splendidly coördinated in Shakespeare was distributed with a sparing hand among his great contemporaries, so that no one should be gifted with more than one particular excellence. Thus Heywood has the master's inimitable tenderness, Middleton his comic richness and sweetness, Massinger his weight and dignity, Beaumont his sense of refined and delicate beauty, and so on. Certainly, no one would hesitate in deciding which of Shakespeare's attributes is most prominent in the work of Webster: it is that fullness, that splendor of imagination, which is perhaps the greatest of all the great Shakespearean characteristics, which is to be found more or less in even the weakest Elizabethan, but which in none, not even in Chapman, is so pronounced as in the author of *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. Webster was a keen observer of human life, he was no mean master of comedy, and as a creator of character he stands well up, if not among the highest; but we think of him first and chiefly as a great poet, who put into the mouths of ideal men and women that gorgeous and forgotten language whose beauty and power must echo forever in the ears of all lovers of imaginative song. The great plays of Webster are such as Donne might have written, if Donne had been a dramatist. Those who know the verse of the Dean of St. Paul's will feel that to say this is to say all.

The lesser plays of Webster call for comparatively little notice. *Appius and Virginia* is chiefly interesting for its difference from the two great tragedies, being much better constructed and having little or nothing of their poetical merits. *Sir Thomas Wyatt* is too ruinous to be considered critically. The comedies in which Webster worked with Dekker and with Rowley respectively have excellent qualities, but quite as much those of one author as of the other. *The Devil's Law-Case* has

touches of fine poetry and of profound feeling, like the following:—

“Come, age, and wither me into the malice
Of those that have been happy.”¹¹

These are hardly abundant enough, however, to redeem a chaotic construction.

In both of Webster's chief works the prominent part is played by women. *The White Devil* is a tumultuous sort of tragedy, difficult to follow clearly, not developing with any systematic or organic growth. Yet the heroine, Vittoria Corombona, is greatly conceived and presented. At first the wife of a man in comparatively humble station, she becomes the mistress of the Duke of Brachiano. Soon afterward, the Duke procures the death of his own wife and of Vittoria's husband. Vittoria is accused of these murders and defends herself with masterly effrontery, but is sentenced to be confined in a house of convertites. She escapes with the aid of the Duke and becomes his wife; but the guilty pair are pursued by the vengeance of the first wife's relatives, who do not sleep until they have obtained the Duke's death by poison and that of his paramour by direct violence. What is interesting in this tale of blood and horror is the vigor and energy of Vittoria's character. She is no such capricious and unreflecting chitterling as Beatrice in *The Changeling*. She realizes fully every step she takes and keeps collected and in readiness always the full strength of her splendid and masculine intellect. Even in the moment of death her courage does not leave her. “I'll tell thee what,” she cries,—

“I'll tell thee what,
I will not in my death shed one base tear;
Or if look pale, for want of blood, not fear.”¹²

If she has any fear at all, it is not of human justice, but of that vague and dark beyond the thought of which makes her scream with a momentary shudder:—

“My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,
Is driven, I know not whither.”¹²

¹¹ *The Devil's Law-Case*, III, 3.

¹² *The White Devil*, V, 6.

Not the least interesting feature of Vittoria's character is its mystery. She is not made plain and simple by external comment so that we can read her at once and pass on our way contented. Guilty she clearly is, but how guilty we cannot justly determine. We know not whether she is merely following the dictates of cold and deliberate ambition in her amour, or whether she is really the monster of evil which her enemies declare her to be. So also with her beauty: we picture her to ourselves as having a fatal and overwhelming loveliness, like Cleopatra's, but there is no hint of this given us, such as Enobarbus's description in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The charm of this element of mystery is well worth observing; and it is interesting to note also that a great deal of it attaches to Cleopatra's own conduct in Shakespeare's play, as is seen at once by comparing that masterpiece with Dryden's tragedy on the same subject, in which Cleopatra is merely a simple, sentimental, lovesick girl.

The Duchess of Malfi, like *The White Devil*, is one of those Italian stories, full of hatred, wrath and wickedness, of which the Elizabethans were so fond. The heroine, however, is a very different figure from Vittoria and far more winning. Vittoria, if I read her rightly, is impatient of the simple joys of humble life, is full of ambition, of restless desire for power, for glory, for adoration. The Duchess, on the other hand, has tasted all the sweet of earthly grandeur, is born to it and feels its emptiness, has lived with it and has known the sad satiety it brings. The truer, simpler life of woman: a husband to worship, children to love and rear—these are what she would wish for herself, if the choice were hers. And so, all through the play, we feel in her the tragedy of a life "out of suits with fortune", as truly as if she were poor and longed in vain for wealth and splendor that could never be hers. She is the victim of a cruel and hopeless fatality, which pursues her relentlessly to the very end.

A widow at the opening of the play, she is the object of the jealous hatred of her brothers, Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal. They harshly threaten her with the severest penalties, if she should forget herself and marry beneath her. Too late; for already her heart is given to her steward Antonio, and with

true woman's scorn she resents their interference,—after they are out of hearing:—

“ Shall this move me? If all my royal kindred
Lay in my way unto this marriage,
I 'd make them my low footsteps.”¹³

Immediately she proceeds to declare her love to Antonio, he having been hitherto ignorant of it. The scene is a charming one. With bewitching cajolery, with gentle, dainty hints of dim, sweet meaning, she leads him on whither she would have him go, and then, as he gradually grows bolder and anticipates her confession, she bursts out impatiently:—

“ The misery of us that are born great!
We are forced to woo, because none dare woo us;
And as a tyrant doubles with his words,
And fearfully equivocates, so we
Are forced to express our violent passions
In riddles and in dreams, and leave the path
Of simple virtue, which was never made
To seem the thing it is not.”¹³

Antonio accepts the privilege accorded him with perfect dignity and propriety; for we know from the first that he is an honorable man and well worthy of her choice.

The action of the play is somewhat straggling and makes nothing of months and years; but the lady must have had some quiet hours of happiness, even though stolen and secret, for a long time passes before we hear of her again. Meantime her brothers have not been idle; they have established in her household the spy and traitor Bosola, to keep a watch upon her actions. This Bosola is the most elaborately studied character in the play, and a profoundly interesting one. We cannot stop to dwell upon him, however, except as he affects the fortunes of his mistress. Finally he discovers that she has a lover, though he cannot as yet tell whom. He at once imparts the news to Duke Ferdinand, who comes galloping post-haste upon the very hint of it. He sees his sister. He rails at her. He charges her at first with lawless love; but she stops his mouth with the

¹³ *The Duchess of Malfi*, I, 1.

revelation of her marriage, although she will not say to whom. Still he rails; and she quietly and simply pleads with him:—

“Why might not I marry?
I have not gone about in this to create
Any new world or custom.”¹⁴

“Why should only I,
Of all the other princes of the world,
Be cased up like a holy relic? I have youth
And a little beauty.”¹⁴

Vain to argue with this turbulent imbecile! He rages till he foams at the mouth; then leaves her with the vow never to see her more.

Quick! she decides, Antonio must be got out of his reach, Antonio and the children,—for there are children, the darlings of her heart. Poor foolish woman! Whom does she take as confidant in this emergency? Whom but Bosola, the wolf in sheep's clothing, the fiend in man's clothing, her greatest enemy of all? With his apparent connivance they fly to Ancona; but the Cardinal's power is sufficient to banish them thence. At Bosola's suggestion the Duchess then consents to part from her husband and throw herself on her brother's mercy, while Antonio flies with his son to Milan. There are extraordinary pathos and beauty in their parting:—

“*Antonio*: Best of my life, farewell, since we must part:
Heaven hath a hand in 't; but no otherwise
Than as some curious artist takes in sunder
A clock or watch, when it is out of frame,
To bring 't in better order.

“*Duchess*: I know not which is best,
To see you dead, or part with you. . . .
O Heaven, thy heavy hand is in 't.
I have seen my little boy oft scourge his top,
And compared myself to 't: naught made me e'er
Go right but Heaven's scourge-stick.

“*Antonio*: Do not weep:
Heaven fashioned us of nothing, and we strive
To bring ourselves to nothing.”¹⁵

The whole fourth act is sustained on a very high level of dramatic and tragic intensity. As Lamb says, there is an ele-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 5.

ment of the supernatural about it; yet in spite of the devilish ingenuity of Ferdinand's inventions, of the dumb show in wax of Antonio's death, of the strange torment of the madmen introduced to heap horror upon the Duchess's head, the tragic never degenerates into the grotesque, but is saved from it by the richness and splendor of Webster's imaginative touch.

The Duchess is first falsely persuaded of the death of her husband and child. That is enough for her. She has no wish for longer life for herself:—

“Who must despatch me?
I account this world a tedious theatre,
For I do play a part in 't 'gainst my will.”¹⁶

When the tormentor Bosola gives way to some vague motions of compassion she cries to him:—

“Thou art a fool, then,
To waste thy pity on a thing so wretched
As cannot pity itself. I am full of daggers.
Puff, let me blow these vipers from me.”¹⁶

The insatiable hatred of Ferdinand, however, is not content with having reduced her to despair. He would, if possible, drive her tortured reason beyond the limits assigned to common human agony. He lets loose a crew of madmen, whose ravings within her hearing and sight are enough to overturn a brain less shaken than hers has been by torments of its own. Yet she endures with that numbed fortitude which comes when the heart has suffered beyond even the violent reaction of grief. Then at last comes Bosola with the dread and final mandate, to her rather a blessed release, only in its execution terrible. He parleys with her in that language which we should say that Shakespeare alone knew, if the other Elizabethans did not sometimes catch such splendid echoes of it. This portion of the scene is in prose, like the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*:—

“*Duchess*: Thou art not mad, sure: dost know me?

“*Bosola*: Yes.

“*Duchess*: Who am I?

“*Bosola*: Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best but a salvatory of green mummy. What's this flesh? A little crudded milk, fantastical

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 1.

puff-paste. Our bodies are weaker than those paper-prisons boys use to keep flies in, more contemptible, since ours is to preserve earth-worms. Didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass, and the Heaven o'er our heads, like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison.

"*Duchess*: Am not I thy duchess?

"*Bosola*: Thou art some great woman, sure, for riot begins to sit on thy forehead (clad in grey hairs) twenty years sooner than on a merry milkmaid's. Thou sleepest worse than if a mouse should be forced to take up her lodging in a cat's ear: a little infant that breeds its teeth, should it lie with thee, would cry out, as if thou wert the more unquiet bedfellow.

"*Duchess*: I am Duchess of Malfi still.

"*Bosola*: That makes thy sleeps so broken:

Glories, like glow-worms, afar off shine bright,
But looked to near, have neither heat nor light."¹⁷

The more he seeks to frighten her, the calmer she becomes. When the thought of death is clearly brought home to her, she gives her last injunctions, those nearest to the mother's heart:—

"I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl
Say her prayers ere she sleep.
 . . . Now what you please;
What death?"¹⁷

And she meets the cruel rope with a heart as high as a princess's, yet humble as a saint's:—

"Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength
Must pull down Heaven upon me:—
Yet stay; Heaven-gates are not so highly arched
As princes' palaces: they that enter there
Must go upon their knees."¹⁷

So we take leave of her. What matters the rest? Her brothers meet their due. The remorse of Fedinand begins when he sees the dead body and cries out in the unforgettable words:—

"Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young."¹⁷

It begins thus, and ends in a madhouse, as it should. Antonio meets his death, as did his wife, at Bosola's hands. The same terrible instrument of fate destroys the licentious Cardinal.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 2.

Finally Bosola himself, whose part in the whole tragedy is so central, and whose motives are so mysterious, even to himself, perishes by a blow from the mad Ferdinand. In his last words he sums up magnificently the sort of unmeaning and horrible fatality which seems to run riot through the whole play, and to make it less a complete artistic tragedy than a ghostly and fearful transcript of human sin and suffering illuminated and interpreted by poetry and thought. When asked how Antonio came to his death, Bosola replies:—

“ In a mist ; I know not how :
Such a mistake as I have often seen
In a play. O, I am gone !
We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves,
That, ruined, yield no echo. Fare you well.
It may be pain, but no harm, to me to die
In so good a quarrel. O, this gloomy world !
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live !”¹⁸

GAMALIEL BRADFORD.

Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 5.